

## Ensuring Wellbeing for Educators in In Home Care

### Why is wellbeing Important?

The role of wellbeing is very important when working with children, families and colleagues. We know that working as an In-Home Care educator your roles can be complex, demanding, busy and require specialised knowledge. Research has found that Early Childhood educators have a history of feeling underpaid and undervalued. Only in recent years have we seen a real shift in recognition of the importance of early childhood education and care, and how imperative it is to have qualified and dedicated workers in the industry. This respect within the broader community and recognition by the government has played a huge part in increasing our overall professional wellbeing. To be happy in our work, educators need to be recognised, appreciated, and supported mentally and physically.

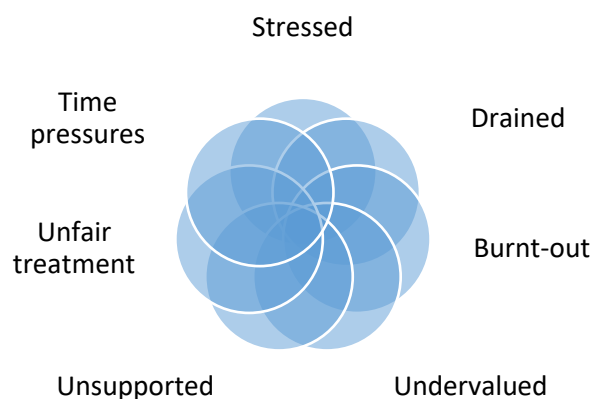
If you have positive wellbeing, you are then likely to experience:

- High levels of professional satisfaction
- Mental and physical health
- Be more responsive to the needs of children and build positive relationships with the family
- Be more resilient and cope with change
- Engage in teachable moments
- Increased productivity

Without wellbeing, studies have found that being an Early Childhood educator is not a sustainable career and can often see individuals leaving the profession due to stress and emotional exhaustion.

Can you think of a time when your wellbeing has been compromised due to your work?

Can you relate to any of the terms?



To ensure we maintain a positive sense of wellbeing, we must understand what can be detrimental to our wellbeing, and then look at strategies to manage this.

## Stress factors that can challenge our wellbeing

The nature of working as an In Home Care educator can present challenges that are seen in all areas of the industry, as well as unique stresses.

Here are some common stressors encountered by IHC educators:

- Having to suppress emotions such as frustration, sadness, anger and anxiety
- Pressure of responsibility – caring for other people's children and completing tasks
- WHS – How to manage an unsafe environment
- Working long shifts
- Dealing with the family issues – Domestic violence, mental health, sickness or disabilities
- Purchasing age-appropriate resources when working with different ages
- Payment issues, contracts not renewing, changing families
- Illness/sick days – as educators it is a reality of the job that you are exposed to and have a higher chance of being sick. You then have the stress of 'who's going to look after the children?' 'perhaps if working as a sole trader not getting paid or if employed 'how many sick days do I have left?'

There are also stress factors that can be unique to rural and remote educators:

- Isolation from their own family, friends, and support network
- Living on the same property as the family
- Unable to 'switch off' from the work environment
- Less access to resources
- Less access to face-to-face professional development and training
- Extreme weather events
- Less opportunities to network with other educators

## Impacts of Covid-19 on educator wellbeing

In addition to these regular stressors, COVID-19 has added additional stresses for educators in all areas of the industry, including IHC educators. These include:

- The risk of going into other's homes
  - Have people been social distancing?
  - Have families visit hot spots?
  - Are families worried about educators bringing the virus into their home?
  - Are any family members who are medical staff? They may be at higher risk
- Unknown hygiene practices of the family
  - Are the family members hand washing appropriately?
  - Are the educators also hand washing appropriately?
  - Are children also attending childcare and possibly being exposed to COVID?

- Lack of work available
  - Family members losing their jobs
  - Families isolating
  - Impacts of the relief package
  - Families reducing hours due to their own work hours being reduced or having to go on job keeper
- Working with unwell children or vulnerable families
  - Having to be extra vigilant with monitoring symptoms
  - Temperature checking

So how can we manage a challenge such as COVID and maintain our personal wellbeing? We can often become quickly overwhelmed when things are not in our control. An effective coping strategy is to remain focused on the things that are in your control and invest your energy there. When working with children, focus on social and emotional learning – think about how these unprecedented circumstances may be impacting them, and how you can comfort them and build on their resilience.

Allow families to express their feelings and concerns, but make sure you acknowledge your own boundaries. It is important for your personal wellbeing that you do not take on other people's emotions. Refer families to appropriate support networks if you feel they need additional support that is beyond your role.

With events such as pandemics, there is ample opportunity to strengthen relationships with the families we work with. It is a chance to come together and support each other navigate these challenging times. It is not realistic to eliminate all these challenges; instead, we must look at how to manage them and cope when they do happen.

## Support Strategies that Educators can implement

Educator's wellbeing has many influencing factors, and therefore is the responsibility of everyone. Service providers, educators and families are all responsible and need to collaborate to ensure educator wellbeing is a priority, and the benefits of this will then filter through to benefit families and children alike. Strategies that Educators can implement to benefit themselves include:

- Develop open and honest relationships with service provider
- Ensure a culture of respect with families you work with
- Allowing time for professional discussion with other service providers
- Try not to make assumptions – maintain perspective
- Try and resolve issues before they become overwhelming.
- Meditation and mindfulness
- Asking for help
- Remind yourself of your passions and why you chose the job
- Sleep well
- Eat well

- Exercise
- Work-life balance
- Socialise
- Professional Networking

## Reflective questions for Educators to ask themselves

If you are an educator wanting to improve your personal wellbeing, you may find it helpful to ask yourself these reflective questions after this session. Record your responses and set out a plan of how you can achieve these, or some steps towards the goals.

- What changes would enhance my wellbeing?
- Who do you contact for support?
- Who do you have for professional networking?
- What could you do enhance your job satisfaction?
- Can you see yourself in this career for a long time?
- How can you manage your stresses?
- What are some things you can do throughout the working week to promote self-care?

## Resources for educators

### **Smiling Mind App**

*Practice your daily meditation and mindfulness exercises from any device. Smiling Mind is a unique tool developed by psychologists and educators to help bring balance to your life. We suggest 10 minutes a day.*

### **The Educator Wellbeing project**

*Follow page on Facebook for PD sessions, networking and articles related to ECEC wellbeing*

### **ACECQA #educatorwellbeingwednesday**

*Follow this hashtag on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram for regular updates from ACECQA*

### **Beyou: Wellbeing tools for you**

*Fantastic collection of resources and support networking*

### **Heads up**

*Workplace resources such as videos and fact sheets for workers, managers to assist in promoting mental wellbeing in the workplace*

## Support strategies for Service Providers

Strong leadership and management are imperative for educator's wellbeing and healthy work environments. Mentoring, time for reflection and discussion are key methods of enhancing workplace wellbeing. Always be open to contacting your family liaison facilitator or manager for support. Here are some things Service Providers can do for their educators:

- Ensure Policies and Procedures are in place
- Ensuring educators have a person to contact
- Staying connected with Educators
- Build a supportive environment
- Provide educators with recognition
- Observe and monitor educator stress levels
- Gain feedback on professional satisfaction
- Provide access to counselling
- Ensure educators are having breaks/ leave
- Acknowledge and plan for common stressors

## References

- “Supporting Educators Wellbeing” ACECQA Fact Sheet April 2020
- “Staff Wellbeing” BeYou factsheet, [beyou.edu.au](http://beyou.edu.au)
- “Educators Wellbeing” Article from ACECQA We Hear You Blog 2019
- “Understanding and Supporting Educator Wellbeing” ECA Article by Catherine Jones 2019
- “Workplace Wellbeing” Brochure from Black Dog Institute
- “Understanding Supporting Educator Wellbeing” The Spoke, [earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au](http://earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au)
- “Coronavirus: Adapting to changes” BeYou Fact sheet, [beyou.edu.au](http://beyou.edu.au)

*We wish you the best in your pursuit of quality education and care for children.*